

Week Ending Friday, July 12, 1996

The President's Radio Address

July 6, 1996

Good morning. This holiday weekend we celebrate America's birthday and the values that hold us together as a community and a country. It's a time for family and fun, for games and fireworks and backyard barbecues. Tonight, smoke will curl over homes on nearly every block as millions of families gather around the grill for the most American of meals: hamburgers and hotdogs and barbecued chicken.

Today I want to talk to you about the steps we're taking to make sure the food we cook in backyard barbecues is safe and wholesome. Our families have every right to expect the food they serve their children is safe. They have every right to expect the world's most bountiful food supply will also be the world's safest. And, in fact, our food is very safe.

Nearly a century ago, after muckrakers exposed dirty conditions in meat-packing plants, we made a national commitment to protect the public from unsafe food. It was one of the first ways we came together to meet the challenges of that new industrial age. Last year, we put in place new safety precautions for seafood. And in recent years, we've learned that we all must continue to be vigilant on meat and poultry safety, and we learned it the hard way. For every year, scores of Americans still die and tens of thousands become sick from eating meat or poultry that is contaminated with harmful bacteria.

We all remember how in 1993 tragedy struck hundreds of families in the Western United States. Undercooked hamburgers served in a fast food restaurant were contaminated with a deadly strain of *E. coli* bacteria. Five hundred people became ill and four children died.

The parents of many of the *E. coli* victims turned their grief into a determination to

help others. Some of them are here with me today. In the face of this unspeakable tragedy, they had one insistent question: How could this have happened? I asked that question too, and I asked my administration, what can we do to prevent it from happening again?

Now, sometimes food makes us sick because it's undercooked. But sometimes, families have been exposed to illnesses because some meat and poultry shipped to our supermarket shelves contained invisible and deadly bacteria. The reason was shocking and simple: For all our technological advances, the way we inspect meat and poultry had not changed in 90 years. Even though we know that killers such as salmonella can only be seen with a microscope, inspectors were still checking on meat and poultry by look, touch, smell. We relied on an overworked cadre of Government inspectors, rather than working with the industry and challenging it to keep food safe.

Under the direction of Vice President Gore and Secretary Glickman, the United States Department of Agriculture has worked with industry, scientists, farmers, parents, and consumers to completely revamp our meat and poultry inspection system, to revolutionize the way our Nation protects food safety. This morning, I want to announce the major changes that the U.S. Department of Agriculture will take to keep food safe and to protect our children from deadly bacteria.

First, we're challenging every meat-packing plant in America to do scientific tests or take other safety precautions at every step of production. Each company must design and put in place its own tough plan. We're not imposing a detailed list of do's and don'ts. We're working with industry as partners, challenging them to find ways to make our meat the safest it can be. Each plant will be held accountable for meeting high standards at every step of the process. Second, we're insisting that every slaughterhouse begin to

conduct rigorous scientific tests to make sure the meat is not contaminated with deadly strains of *E. coli* and salmonella bacteria. Third, companies will have to improve their sanitation procedures. All too often, food is contaminated because simple sanitary rules are not followed.

All these changes will be phased in over the coming months to make sure they are done right. These new meat and poultry contamination safeguards will be the strongest ever. They are flexible, and they do challenge the private sector to take responsibility. They also use the most up-to-date science to track down invisible threats. They protect the public without tangling business in redtape.

Parents should know that when they serve a chicken dinner they're not putting their children at risk. Parents should know that when a teenager borrows the car to get a fast food hamburger, the hamburger should be the least of their worries. Our new food safety initiative will give families the security to know that the food they eat is as safe as it can be.

To be sure, parents will also still have to take responsibility. There is no way to make food entirely free from risk; nature simply won't let us. So everyone should follow warning labels, be careful how you handle raw meat and poultry, and make sure it's well cooked before you serve it to your family.

These days families have enough to worry about. They shouldn't have to fear the food they eat is unsafe. With the tough steps we're taking today, America's parents should be able to breathe a little easier.

Have a safe and happy Fourth of July weekend.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:06 a.m. from the Oval Office at the White House.

Remarks Prior to Discussions With President Aleksander Kwasniewski of Poland and an Exchange With Reporters

July 8, 1996

President Clinton. Let me begin by saying I'm delighted to welcome President Kwasniewski to Washington and to the Oval Office, and I want to thank him for the hospi-

talities that he extended to the First Lady a few days ago.

The United States and Poland have established a strong partnership. We've worked together in the Partnership For Peace. Our troops are serving together in Bosnia. We are the number one foreign investor in Poland. And I am very pleased with the state of our relations and the aggressive leadership that the President is giving to his nation.

We're going to discuss a lot of issues that are affecting our future relations and the future of Poland, including the question of NATO enlargement, which has been a disciplined, open process since 1994, now, since the United States initiated it. And I want to reiterate my conviction that the process will continue and will bear fruit in the way that we have done it. I think that we are doing it in the right way, and that's the way I think we should continue to do it.

But I'm looking forward to our discussion. I've wanted to meet him for some time, and I got a great report on Poland from Hillary the other night, so I'm looking forward to it.

NATO Expansion

Q. Mr. President, will you talk about the timing? As you say, this has been going on since 1994. Will you talk about the timing of NATO expansion?

President Clinton. We will. Certainly we will. We'll talk about what is planned for the December ministerial and what will happen after that.

Q. Senator Dole has talked about 1998. Are you willing to be as precise as that?

President Clinton. Well, first of all, I'm glad that he supports the expansion of NATO. And secondly, I think it's important for me as President to adhere in all my public comments to the things that we've agreed among our NATO Allies to do. Keep in mind, this is a process that has to proceed by consensus, and we have to have the support of all the Allies to do what we wish to do. So, I will continue to say what I have said all along. But you should make no mistake about it, NATO will expand.